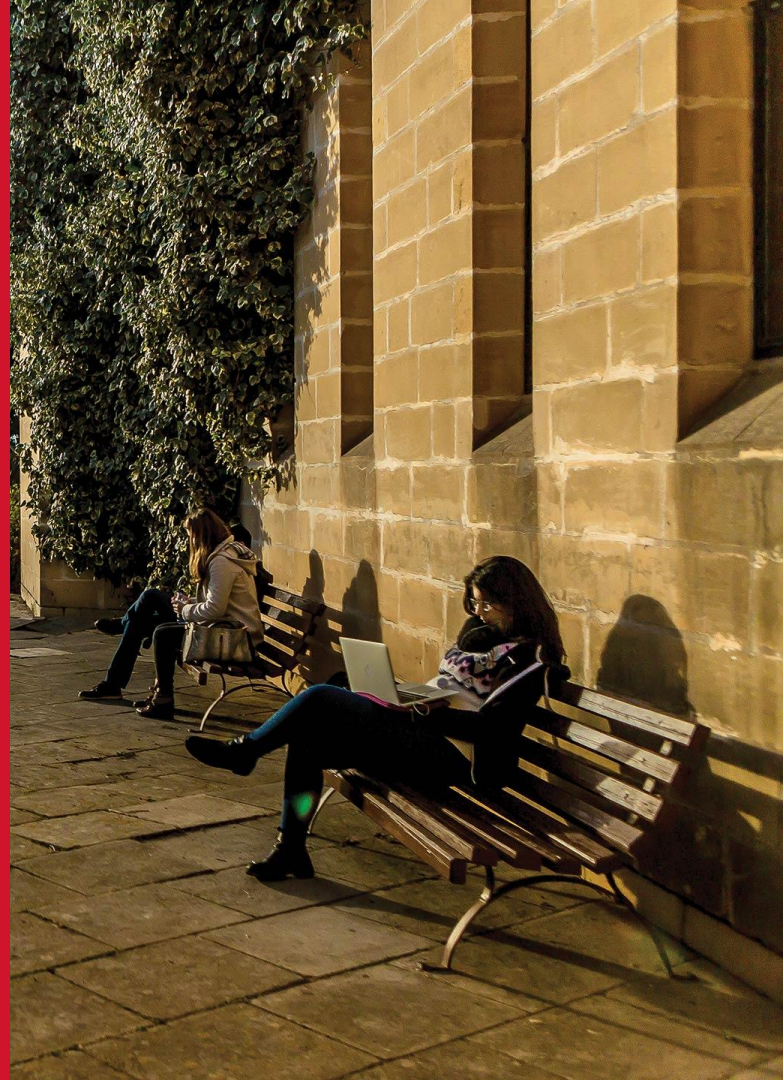# Digital libraries

The future of libraries in the 21st century?

Martin Lochman, MLIS
Outreach Department

L-Università ta' Malta

Definition(s)

"Digital library is an organized collection of digital objects (text, images, audio, video, etc.) which is accompanied by adequate services and accessible online."

→   Key points: organized collection - services - online access
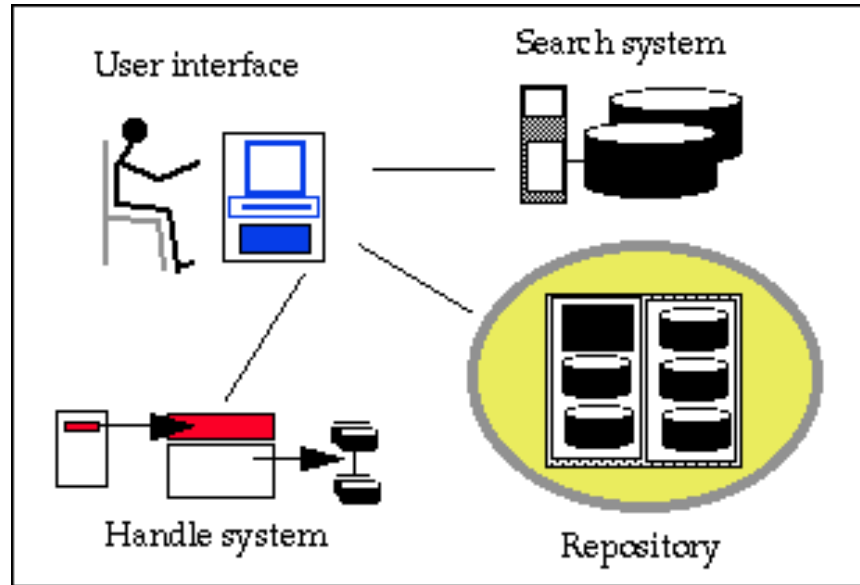
→   DL as a system/tool

"A digital library is an organization that provides appropriate resources (including specialized staff) that enable selection, structuration, intellectual access, interpretation, distribution, preservation of the integrity, persistence over time of collections of digital works, so that they are readily and economically available for use by a defined community or set of communities."

→   Key points: organization – community

→   DL as a service

Key characteristics

- **Accessibility** - easier access to information
- **Heterogeneity** of information resources
    - Formats: text, pictures, audio, video, etc.
    - Origin: born digital vs. "digital surrogates"
- **Management** of information resources
    - Incl. Acquisition, processing, and preservation
- Application of **IT** - technology & humans
- **User servicers** - searching, browsing, retrieving, etc.
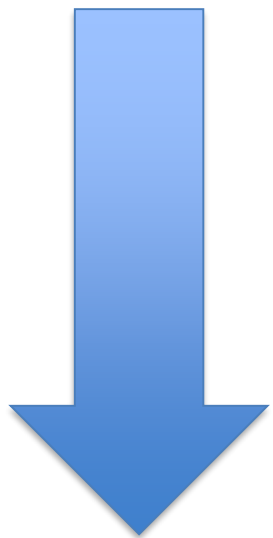
Kahn/Wilensky model

Advantages of digital libraries

- Nearly unlimited storage space
- No physical boundaries - more users!
- 24/7 availability + immediate access
- Multiple access to the same resource
- Enhanced information retrieval
- Preservation of archival materials
- Less staff necessary

...and some drawbacks

- The social aspect
- Copyright
- Lack of a hard copy
- Efficiency of search
- Hardware and software obsolescence
- Cost of transformation from physical to electronic material
- Information literacy
- Internet dependency

L-Università ta' Malta

Evolution?

Traditional libraries

Hybrid libraries

Digital libraries

L-Università ta' Malta

Selected examples (1)

Project Gutenberg

- [Link](#)
- The oldest digital library, launched in 1971
- Goal: to encourage the creation and distribution of electronic books
- Materials: eBooks (different formats)
- Over 60 thousand items (as of October 2020)
- User services:
    - Searching and browsing
    - Mobile site
    - Downloading onto your devices

Selected examples (2)

Digital Public Library of America

- [Link]

- A national digital library for the US; launched 2013

- Aimed at providing public access to materials from American libraries, museums, archives and other digital heritage institutions

- Materials: photographs, books, maps, news footage, oral histories, personal letters, museum objects, artwork, government documents, and more

- Over 40 million items (as of October 2020)

- User services:
    - Searching and browsing
    - Social media connection
    - Create and download lists of items

Selected examples (3)

Europeana

- [Link](#)
- Digital library for European cultural heritage; launched in 2009
- Provides access to different types of institutions across Europe (museums, archives, libraries, etc.)
- Materials:
  - artworks, artefacts, books, films, music, and more
- Over 51 million items (as of October 2020)
- User services:
  - Multilingual interface
  - Newsletter (in English & French)
  - Searching and browsing

L-Università ta' Malta

Selected examples (4)

arXiv

- [Link](#)
- Digital archive (library) of electronic preprints (ePrints), launched 1991
- Materials: scientific papers in the fields of mathematics, physics, astronomy, electrical engineering, computer science, quantitative biology, statistics, mathematical finance and economics
- Over 1,7 million items (as of October 202
- User services:
  - Searching and browsing
  - Personal account creation

arXiv.org

L-Università ta' Malta

Thank you for your attention!